

The Parish of Donhead St Mary Annual Parish Meeting

Wednesday 1st May 2024 at 7pm
The New Remembrance Hall, Charlton.

Present:

- 12 Members of the Public (inc 10 parish councillors)
- Cllr John Feltham – Parish Council Chairman / Meeting Chair
- Wiltshire Councillor Richard Budden
- The Parish Clerk – Simon Pritchard

Minutes:

1. Welcome & Apologies for Absence:

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially the two members of the public who were not members of the parish council.

2. Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting 2023:

The minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 3rd May 2023 had been circulated at the time and were available from the parish council website.

The meeting adopted the minutes.

3. Report from Parish Council Chairman:

The chairman gave a summary of what the parish council had been up to over the last year including:

- After over a decade of collapse, the wall in Charlton Cemetery has been re-built, with the works having been commissioned by the Parish Council.
- The Churchyard around St John's Church is being formally closed and the Parish Council will take over management.
- The Parish Council has pledged finance support to the sports club for a new roof.
- Financial support given to St Mary Village Hall for a film projector.
- Financial support given for improvements to the entrance to the Memorial Field.
- Project to install yellow lines outside of Ludwell School to improve safety completed.
- The two play areas in the parish continue to be inspected and maintained by the Parish Council with fourth equipment being explored.
- Support given to residents in Coronation Drive when Wiltshire Council intervened with the long establish Fish & Chips night.
- Thanks to all the Councillors who have their areas of extra responsibility on the Parish Council, thanks to the Parish Clerk and the Wiltshire Councillor Richard Budden.
- The Councillors thanked the Chair for his efforts over the years.

4. Report from Wiltshire Councillor:

Cllr Budden had issued an April report to local Parish Councils, this formed the basis of his verbal report and is attached to these minutes in full.

Roads, rivers and rubbish seems to form the basis of most of work generated. Noted that a recent newspaper report put Wiltshire Council as one of the worst performing councils in England, ranking it as 297 out of 317 in The Times, using The Office of National Statistics Data.

Roads:

The local highways continue to be in a sorry state. Have been banging the drum and collecting statistics to make the case for more investment.

Rivers:

The quality of the Nadder headwater is rated as unsatisfactory, it is being caused by either Farmers, or Humans as there is no heavy industry.

Wiltshire Council has funding to replace residents' old septic tanks at no cost to the householder – want to get this message out.

Still not clear if this funding can be used to connect a property to the mains sewer.

Rubbish:

Have been campaign about the amount of rubbish that is sent to landfill or is being incinerated.

5. Reports from local groups and organisations:

No reports received.

6. Reports from Members of the Parish Council with Portfolios

Cllr Dewey – Speed Indicator Device (SID):

- The Parish Council have purchased a new SID that is currently on the A30 Charlton Crossroads. The old SID that is on the A30 at Birdbush, this is on its last legs and only shows speed, it cannot record data. The old SID is jointly own with Tollard Royal Parish Council and they have indicated that they would like to come and take it away, so Donhead St Mary Parish Council and going to gift them its half.
 - The A30 around the Rising Sun had a Wiltshire Council speed monitor in place for a few weeks and the result was that the average speed is not high enough to qualify for a Police speed trap.
 - Wiltshire Council offer SID training, so have signed up.
 - It is being proposed at the following Parish Council meeting that the council buy an auto-speed-watch camera, this does not show drivers their speed, it records vehicle speeds and registration number plates. Information about persistent speeders could then be sent to the Police, it is understood the Police would send the registered owner a formal letter.
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- The cutting down of some the trees from the bottle of Ludwell up to the Charlton crossroads in the grove was mentioned. It was confirmed that these works will have been carried out by Wiltshire Council as they are the Highways Authority.

- Thanks was given to Cllr Budden for his efforts in having a change of use planning application refused on a barn on Wincombe Lane (just off the A350).

7. Open Public Parish Forum:

Residents are invited to discuss any matter affecting the Parish.

- A member of the public drew the meetings attention to the cutting of the grass at the Charlton crossroads and that it wasn't been done far enough back so the visibility splay was reduced. Advised that Wiltshire Council is the Highways Authority and that such things can easily be reported to them via their website and a phone app both called 'my wilts'.
- A question about which dog bins are on the Parish Council's contract to be emptied. This was confirmed as being the two new 'dog bins' and the one next to the play park.
- A member of the public had attended to bring the council attention to a planning app (Hillside Cottage, Higher Coombe PL/2024/03052) and their objections to it (The application was on the parish council meeting agenda that followed the annual parish meeting). They object to the application because: the existing property is a holiday let and normally has 4 cars, there is a lot of extra movement in the narrow lane; it is not a good junction onto the main road. They accept the principal of development, but this is not the right sort. Highways have flagged up access issues and a lack of information being provided by the applicant.
- A Second member of the public had attended to object to planning application at Hillside Cottage; second complaint about cars, speed, the number of cars, cars parked up on the road. The application has no provision for parking.
- A resident raised concern about a planning application for an extension that has been approved on their neighbour's house. No approach from the applicant. Only notified after approval. It is a prefab house not a standard construction, this doesn't not appear to have been picked up in the application. Suggested that this was possibly a Wiltshire Council Building Regulations matter, Cllr Budden will find out. Suggested resident should engage a solicitor and they do have some legal protection under a party-wall agreement, where the neighbouring property must not carry out any works to their home that may damage the home next door.

Closed 20:17

Agenda Item 4 - Cllr Budden April 2024 report to Parish Councils:

1. **I attended an extraordinary meeting of the Cabinet on March 12th that was called to approve the Council's formal application to participate in the Department for Education (DfE) programme known as 'Safety Valve' that supports Councils which have a very high deficit in the High Need Block (HNB) of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).**
The deadline for applications was that day.

The HNB is the part of the DSG that primarily supports pupils who have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND), and approximately two thirds of councils in England have some level of deficit in their HNB. In Wiltshire this cumulative deficit has grown from £2.1m in 2018/19 to £35.2m in 2022/23 and it is forecast to continue growing.

The deficit is held in a negative reserve on the council's balance sheet while a statutory override is in place to shield the overall financial position of the council from it. However, the statutory override is due to end in 2026, by which time the forecast is that the cumulative unmitigated deficit could be £117m while there are funds and earmarked reserves of £90m.

A Safety Valve Deal is a formal agreement between a local authority and the DfE which offers councils additional funds to help with their historic deficits and in return the council agrees to deliver a plan to return their DSG to a balanced position over the period of the deal.

2. **On March 14th I took part in the Southern Area Planning Committee that considered planning application PL/2023/05387 concerning Land at Littledown, Shaftesbury, Wiltshire, SP7 9HD for Conversion and Re-use of a Redundant Rural Building for Economic Development (B2/B8) use, that I had called in.** The planners recommended approval, but the committee supported my arguments and rejected the application.
3. **I didn't attend the regular meeting of the Cabinet that took place on March 19th.** It covered the following matters:
 - Arts Council Music Hub Investment Programme
 - A revised Air Quality Action Plan
 - An update on Community Conversations
 - The renewal of a mail printing and production contract for Revenues and Benefits
4. **On Wednesday 20th I attended a meeting of the Environment Select Committee.** The agenda reports pack occupied 34 Mb of data and 400 pages of text. The main item of business was the
 - **Highways Annual Review of Service 2023.** The text of the report covered 360-odd of the text and as a report it was unsatisfactory in a number of ways, not least the spurious level of detail incorporated in hundreds of pages of schedules.

Just before the meeting there had been a change in the composition of the Cabinet; Caroline Thomas had given up her responsibility for Highways that had been taken on by Nick Holder. I called at the meeting for more clarity on expenditure area by area and for a strategy to rebuild minor roads to cope with the impacts of the increased rainfall and intensity of storms that have been predicted for 25 years as a result of global warming. Holder, new to the job, ducked making any commitments, but has assured me privately that he has asked officers to set out their plans for roads through the Donheads, that I have been highlighting.

I had raised with Perry Holmes, the senior legal officer, the issue of legal liability of landowners to control run-off from adjacent land. At the meeting I argued we should have a proactive policy of holding landowners responsible for damage to the highways that results from their negligence. Apparently, this is a legally complex topic, but I was promised a detailed briefing paper.

In addition, there was:-

- **An Update on the Development of the MyWilts Potholes Reporting Functionality.** In essence, the Council accepts the MyWilts app is not working adequately and is re-building it. A roll-out of the new app should happen in the second half of the year.

and

- **An Update on Development of the Libraries and Leisure services,** both of which are still rebuilding following the huge downturn in activity that took place during Covid. In response to a positive assessment of the return to profitability of the leisure service, I asked whether the numbers included the costs and income held by the Council's Facilities Management and was assured that that a comprehensive picture is being compiled.
5. **On Thursday 21st there was a briefing for members of the Environment Select Committee on the progress being made regarding allocation of land for members of the gypsy and traveller community** that will need to be satisfactorily resolved before the Wiltshire local plan, currently the topic of review following the recent public consultation, can be finalised for examination.
 6. **On Tuesday 26th I attended a meeting of the Stone Circle shareholders.** Most of the discussion was centred on the progress being made by the Stone Circle property company buying up existing buildings to offer for rent. While there were a number of questions to address this is continuing to make progress.

The Stone Circle development company is more problematic. While the development on the former sports centre site in Tisbury (not yet started, though approved) is estimated to make an operating profit of £0.45mn that, together with schemes in Marlborough (also ready to go), Wootton Bassett and Devizes (not yet approved) will total £2.7mn, this is insufficient to offset the loss made on one scheme that has been discontinued plus fixed costs and overheads. The result is currently projected to be in an overall loss of £1 mn. Directors of Stone Circle argue this loss can be offset by a combination of 'tenure changes, cost reduction and value engineering'. I drew attention to these words and sought a commitment that the quality of the building of the Tisbury project would not be compromised and received a reassurance from the Stone Circle chair.

The broader issue that arises concerns the future of the Stone Circle development company, which will be considered more fully at the next shareholders meeting in three months' time.

Any thoughts/comments/questions will be most gratefully received.